

UNIVERSITY & THE BAR COURSE

LAW DEGREE

If you choose the direct route when completing the Academic Component of becoming a barrister, you will need to complete a law degree. The type of degree is important: you must complete a Qualifying Law Degree or 'QLD'.

The Law LLB (the abbreviation for *Legum Baccalaureus*, the Latin for Bachelor of Laws) is a QLD. It must not be confused with a Law BA (Bachelor of Arts), which would need to be followed by a Graduate Diploma in Law (known as a 'GDL' or a law conversion course) in order to lead to qualification. The exception to this rule is if you complete a Law BA at Oxford or Cambridge: while the qualification is a BA, it is recognised as a Qualifying Law Degree.

Structure

An LLB typically lasts for 3 years (or 4 years if you opt to take a joint programme with law as a major and another subject as a minor, such as a humanity or a foreign language).

There are 7 core modules which must be studied as part of an LLB:

1. Criminal Law
2. Law of Torts
3. The Law of Contract
4. Land Law (Property Law)
5. Equity and Trusts
6. Constitutional and Administrative Law
7. EU Law

In addition to the core modules, you will also have the chance to study some optional modules from a wide selection. Whether you choose commercial-based subjects, human rights or criminal law and evidence, you can tailor your LLB to suit your strengths and career aspirations.

What is a Law Degree like?

A Qualifying Law Degree can be demanding. There is a vast amount of academically-challenging material to get to grips with. The contact hours, i.e. the number of hours you spend in tuition in lectures or seminars, is relatively low. On any given week, you

may spend between 6-12 hours in tuition. This varies by university. However, the number of hours you spend engaging in key reading and seminar preparation, which typically includes essay writing or practical problem-based questions, is significantly higher.

THE BAR COURSE

What is it?

The Bar Professional Training Course or 'BPTC' was the Vocational Component of becoming a barrister. It was a postgraduate course (commencing after completion of a Qualifying Law Degree or the GDL) which combined advocacy training with tuition on procedure and the laws of evidence, to enable students to develop the knowledge and skills required to practise as a barrister.

→ However, from September 2020 the BPTC will be replaced by a number of new Bar Courses.

Study options

Students can now study for the postgraduate Bar Course in several ways:

- By completing one course, which may be full-time over an academic year or part-time over two academic years;
- By completing two distinct courses, which may involve face-to-face teaching for both courses or may involve self-study for one of the courses; or
- By completing a longer course, which combines the Academic Component (usually an undergraduate degree) with the Vocational Component in an integrated course.

The Bar Courses have different names depending on the provider.

- BPP University - Barrister Training Course (BTC)
<https://www.bpp.com/courses/law/postgraduate/btc-barrister-training-course>
- Cardiff University - Bar Training Course (BTC)
<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught/courses/course/bar-training-course-pgdip>
- Northumbria University - Bar Course
<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/courses/bar-course-ft-dtftbc6/>
- Nottingham Trent University - Barristers Training Course (BTC)

- <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/study-and-courses/courses/find-your-course/law/pf/2020-21/barristers-training-course>
- The City Law School, City, University of London - Bar Vocational Studies (BVS) <https://www.city.ac.uk/study/courses/postgraduate/bar-vocational-studies>
- The Inns of Court College of Advocacy - ICCA Bar Course <https://www.icca.ac.uk/bar-training/>
- The University of Law - Bar Practice Course (BPC) <https://www.law.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/law/bpc/>
- The University of the West of England - Bar Training Course (BTC) <https://courses.uwe.ac.uk/M99C12/bar-training-course>

The overhaul to the training programme enables barrister training to be more flexible, accessible and affordable. The BPTC previously cost in excess of £18,000 in London. The fees for the new Bar Courses range between approximately £11,000-17,000.

Top Tip: Several of the Bar Course providers have numerous flexible study options available, including programmes which award an LLM (Master of Laws). Sometimes the providers also offer funds for scholarships. Take some time to research which type of course and which provider is most suited to your circumstances.

Entry Requirements

Before you can enrol on one of the Bar Courses, you must have completed the Academic Component of becoming a barrister: completion of a Qualifying Law Degree or the Graduate Diploma in Law. If you take the direct route of gaining a QLD, you must have achieved a grade of 2:2 or higher for your undergraduate studies.

→ N.B. Some of the providers for the new courses have upped the academic requirement to a 2:1 – double-check the entrance requirements on the website of the university offering the course you are interested in.

You must also register as a member of an Inn of Court by 31 May in the year in which you commence the Bar Course (the Inns of Court are the professional associations for barristers. For further information, see guide on The Inns of Court).

There is also an entrance test: the Bar Course Aptitude Test or 'BCAT'. The BCAT tests your aptitude for critical thinking and reasoning. It does not test legal knowledge. Its aim is to ensure that those undertaking the Vocational Component of training have the aptitude to succeed.

→ Register for the BCAT here: <https://home.pearsonvue.com/bsb>

N.B. Applications for the Bar Course are made directly to the course provider (university) and not via a centralised system, as was previously the case when you applied for the BPTC (Bar Students Application Service (BarSAS)).

Content

The new Bar Courses have similar content to the BPTC. They will cover a number of compulsory subjects including:

- Advocacy
- Civil litigation and evidence, incorporating dispute resolution
- Conference skills
- Criminal litigation, evidence and sentencing
- Drafting
- Legal research
- Opinion writing
- Professional ethics

WORK EXPERIENCE DURING STUDIES

In addition to academics, work experience is vital to any good application for pupillage. Experience can be gained by shadowing a barrister, clerking, marshalling for a judge, volunteering with a law clinic or pro bono organisation, or undertaking a mini-pupillage (for further information, see guide on Mini-Pupillages & Marshalling).

The academic calendar both at undergraduate and postgraduate level allows students to pursue work experience endeavours. There will be holidays over the Christmas and Easter periods as well as an extended break during the summer.

Top Tip: It is advised that you get as much experience as possible whilst you are studying. It will help inform your choices in relation to which areas of law you are interested in, which optional modules you will study and which sets of chambers you will apply to for pupillage. In the meantime, you will be building up a professional network.

MASTER'S DEGREES

You may wish to study a master's degree to gain more detailed knowledge in a specific area of law. The completion of a master's degree (LLM) is not a prerequisite to

becoming a barrister and may not strengthen an application in the same way practical experience in the industry would.

However, for candidates who are concerned about their academics on paper (for example where they have achieved a lower second class (2:2) or they have received their undergraduate degree from a less well-regarded university), a relevant master's degree from a well-regarded university can bolster the academic section on an application form and help the candidate to stand out.

TOPS TIPS & USEFUL LINKS

The Lawyer Portal has a useful guide on the Bar Course Aptitude Test
<https://www.thelawyerportal.com/free-guides/bptc-overview/bcat/>